

HANDICRAFT FOR SOLDIERS. RELIEVING PERIOD OF CONVALESCENCE.

FROM A CORRESPONDENT.

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Recovery from illness is always a tedious business, and in our new Army it presents special problems. The regular soldier, like his brother in the Navy, has usually learnt to amuse himself during the long periods of idleness and boredom in the remote places that are so often his lot. For the regular forces the hospital is only another kind of solitude to be beguiled in the same way. A man may carve a paper weight for his mother, or tattoo his body with a picture of Herod's daughter; and in the Royal Air Force the making of model aeroplanes is a hobby of growing popularity. But the hobbies of the citizen soldier of our new Army are not usually those of the solitary craftsman, so that in hospital he is condemned to mental and physical inactivity. This retards and may even prevent his full recovery.

The Army Medical Service is alive to this problem. In one military hospital the experiment has been tried of making every patient, as soon as he is well enough, and even while still bedridden, practise some craft which demands not only manual but also some artistic skill. Leather work, basket-making, and poker work have been tried, and doubtless there are many other crafts that would be suitable for the first period of convalescence. The instructors are a few women of the neighbourhood who voluntarily teach the men for several hours each week. The experiment has been an unqualified success. The speed with which the men become proficient is astonishing. A recent sale of work done in the previous two months yielded more than £100, made up of small sums. The doctors are enthusiastic about the effect of the work in relieving the tedium of convalescence, and in shortening its duration. The mental outlook of the man, they say, is quickly improved by 50 per cent. Pride of craftsmanship appears, and the zest for life returns to those who have been utterly weary, miserable, and reluctant to take up the fight again.

VOLUNTARY HELP.

This is a phase of the soldier's return to health that the lay helper can promote, and without the intervention of committees or central organizations. In all towns and villages there are now, thanks to the Women's Institute and other social welfare organizations, women experienced in teaching handicrafts suitable for sick and wounded soldiers who are not yet ready to go to the R.A.M.C. and other convalescent centres for more

strenuous mental and physical training. The military authorities are clearly anxious to enlist this voluntary help. After a small initial outlay for tools and materials the work can be made financially self-supporting.

The movement will inevitably be extended to civil hospitals after the war, when the whole question of rehabilitation of the nation's sick and injured must receive closer attention than it has had in the past. "Lack of adequate facilities for the care of convalescents," says the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, "represents one of the gravest deficiencies in the medical scene to-day."